Marriage

58
178 Like some other customs, marriage among the Kamarakotos seems to be in course of modification in two directions: by the simplification or omission of old elements, social custom once having been both more complex and more rigid than it is now, and by a tendency, encouraged by the more "progressive" men, to approximate Venezuelan customs as far as these are known. Neither of these trends is, however, as yet strong enough markedly to have modified Kamarakoto society. Thus there is a definite feeling that polygamy and what are, by other standards, incestuous unions are not to be encouraged, but both are still common, and, as illustrating the other trend, bride-purchase as an essential requisite has been abandoned, but clear vestiges of it survive.

585 Marriage in a Venezuelan legal sense is, of course, non-existent. There is no authority or register for civil marriage and no priest for religious marriage.
581 Nevertheless it is proper to speak of marriage and not, as a somewhat stiff-spined student in British Guiana has done, merely of "the cohabitation of male
● [588] and female." More casual cohabitation certainly occurs but it is clearly distinguished, even by the Indians, from marriage, a union which is by intention permanent and in which the social and economic considerations are at least as strong as the sexual. The fact that the ceremonies and formalities in vogue in civilized communities are omitted does not alter the fact that this is true marriage in all proper senses of the word.

584 The initiative in marriage may be taken by any of the parties concerned, the man, the woman, and the woman's parents. The man's parents are apparently not considered to be interested parties. Marriage does not take place without consent of the bride and normally the consent of her parents, or at least
583 of her mother, is likewise required. Presents may be given to the bride's parents,
584 and especially to her mother, by the prospective groom, but I was assured that this is by way of persuasion and to promote good feeling and not a prerequisite
[178] to the obtaining of the woman. Nevertheless, this probably is a vestige of the formerly widespread, probably universal, custom of bride-purchase. The purchase commonly took the form of personal service to the bride's father, and a typical example of this occurs in the Kamarakoto legend of Maichak, but this custom has largely been dropped. The groom, naturally well disposed toward the bride's parents, may voluntarily assist them but is never, I was told, obliged
[562] to do so. The repeated emphasis on the bride's mother, rather than her father, is also peculiar and is significant of the relatively high status of women in the tribe.

585 There are no ceremonies or formalities of any sort. When the parties are agreed, the bride and groom simply start living together.

595 The Kamarakotos are polygamous, that is, polygynous. There was some
177 reticence in supplying information as to numbers of wives, an indication of